

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

13 May 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Castro and Communism: The Estimative Record*

1. Was Castro a Communist when he came to power? We are unable to prove or disprove it, but his political record as a whole suggests that he probably was not. The estimates prior to Castro's 1 December 1961 statement that he was a "Marxist-Leninist" did not label him a Communist. But there is clear warning that for most practical purposes his regime should be regarded as Communist.

2. The four following selections from SNIE's and NIE's, 1958-1960, are worthy of note. (The first of these was published six weeks before Castro came to power, and all of them preceded Castro's "Marxist-Leninist" statement by at least a year.) A more extensive selection of excerpts is attached as Annex B.

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Two annexes are attached: Annex A, "A Chronology of Significant Dates," and Annex B, "Relevant Judgments from Estimates and Memoranda." Two broader studies entitled "The Estimative Record on Cuba" and "Positions on Seven Major Aspects of the Cuban Situation in NIE's and SNIE's since Castro's Takeover" (dated 15 November 1960 and 30 July 1962 respectively) were sent forward earlier as memoranda to the Director.

GROUP 1

Excluded from automatic
downgrading and
declassification

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a. SNIE 85-58, "The Situation in Cuba," 24 November 1958:

"While we have insufficient evidence to establish the degree of Communist influence in the 26 of July Movement at the present time, the situation lends itself to Communist exploitation. Fidel Castro's control over his far-flung guerrillas is not so firm that he can prevent Communist infiltration even if he should so desire." (Paragraph 10)

b. SNIE 85-60, "Communist Influence in Cuba," 22 March 1960:

"We believe that Fidel Castro and his government are not now demonstrably under the domination or control of the international Communist movement. Moreover, we believe that they will not soon come under such demonstrable domination or control . . . Yet, we believe that the Cuban regime is in practice following the line set for Latin American Communist parties at the time of the 21st Party Congress in Moscow in February 1959 and that it will continue to pursue policies advantageous to the Communists and to accept Communist assistance and advice in carrying them out. Cuba may give increasing appearances of becoming a Communist society." (Paragraph 8)

c. NIE 85-2-60, "The Situation in Cuba," 14 June 1960:

"We are unable to answer the simplified question 'Is Castro himself a Communist?' Communists are deeply involved in the remodeling of Cuba -- more so than in Guatemala in 1954 -- and the country has become a base for communism in Latin America. Clearly Castro regards the Communists as helpful and reliable allies in achieving his objectives; Communists and their supporters are in positions of importance throughout the revolutionary government. Given the mutuality of interest between the Castro regime and the Cuban Communists, it is difficult, and in most respects academic, to try to distinguish the policy and actions of the Castro regime from those which would be expected of a government under actual Communist control in the present circumstances in Cuba. This situation will almost certainly persist so long as Fidel Castro and his associates remain in power. Indeed, the outlook is for Castro's increased dependence on Communists and they will continue to be able to make many decisions and take many actions without

consulting him. If this trend continues, the Communists will gain de facto control of the Castro regime, and are* near this point now." (Conclusion 4)

- d. SNIE 85-3-60, "Prospects for the Castro Regime,"
8 December 1960:

"It is impossible to distinguish between the policies and actions of the Castro regime and the program presently advocated by the local Communists. The PSP is playing an increasingly important role in the Castro regime. It is providing guidance to Castro through his chief aides. PSP members fill key administrative, managerial, and military positions. The Party's propaganda apparatus is of inestimable value to Castro. The party line laid down at the PSP congress last summer called for continued strong support of Castro, who was characterized as carrying out the essential first steps of a 'revolution of national liberation.' PSP spokesmen indicated that the regime would eventually evolve into a Communist state. Virtually all institutions of Cuban life are being remolded in the likeness of a typical Communist society. In short, for most practical purposes, the present Cuban Government can be regarded as Communist." (Paragraph 5)

3. One can, of course, pick and choose sentences and passages from the estimates that mention Castro without linking him with communism or that discuss the various indications that he was not a disciplined Communist agent. NIE 85-62, "The Situation and Prospects in Cuba," dated 21 March 1962, sums up this situation by noting that, "Since his accession to power in 1959, Castro has collaborated increasingly with the Communists. However, the limited evidence

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The Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, would substitute "may be" for "are."

regarding the precise nature of his relations with the Communists is confused, contradictory, and open to various interpretations . . . While for all intents and purposes we can now consider Castro as being fully wedded to the Communist cause, his passionate avowals do not necessarily mean that he is considered by the Soviet and hardcore Cuban Communists as being a completely indoctrinated, disciplined, and reliable Communist." (Paragraph 19) And, "In sum, the story of Castro's relations with the Communists leaves much unclear. It seems established that he did not make his revolution as a disciplined Communist." (Paragraph 30)

4. In retrospect it seems to us that the confusion about Castro's political character and commitment arose from the fact that he was and is a new kind of phenomenon in the Communist movement. We had been accustomed to think of a Communist as a person firmly committed by formal membership and the acceptance of party discipline, meaning ultimately Moscow's discipline. This is in fact the way it was under Stalin's iron control of the movement. But a looser organization of the Communist movement has developed over the last decade, permitting the association with it of a variety of political types. These are people who accept Communist political verbiage and ideas in a general way and see political advantage in an alliance with the

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local Communist party and with Moscow, but who do not necessarily submit themselves to the traditional discipline of the movement. Many politicians of this type have been appearing in the conditions of revolutionary turmoil which now obtain in newly independent and underdeveloped countries. The Communists, eager to expand their influence and following in these areas, have been willing to work with such politicians pretty much on the latter's own terms. The result has been a variety of shadings in allegiance to Moscow and a blurring of the lines that divide hardcore Communists from others who call themselves Marxists, socialists, radical nationalists, and so forth.

5. Almost certainly Castro should be understood in terms of this kind of development in the ranks of international communism. His early career and the relations of his group to the Cuban Communists before and after the seizure of power make it seem very unlikely that he was a secret and disciplined Communist conducting a political charade. Probably the critical turning point in his career arose from his need, in developing a radical course for his revolution, to adopt a strongly anti-American line. The usefulness of then finding protection and support from the Soviets as the principal opponent of the US was manifest. Ideological accommodation to a

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Soviet alliance was not difficult for one of his temperament.
Since establishing the connection with the USSR, Castro has nevertheless sought to remain more ally than puppet, a further indication that his career cannot be explained in simple terms.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:



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SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

ANNEX A

A CHRONOLOGY OF SIGNIFICANT DATES

26 July 1953	Abortive uprising by Castro
December 1956	Castro invades Cuba and goes into the hills
January 1959	Castro comes to power
April 1959	Castro visits the US
May 1959	First Agrarian Reform Act announced
October 1959	Huber Matos arrested for denouncing growing Communist influence in regime
February 1960	First USSR-Cuban economic agreement signed
March 1960	The French ship <u>La Coubre</u> explodes in Havana harbor; Cuba accuses US
March 1960	President Eisenhower authorizes training of Cuban exiles
7 May 1960	Cuba renews diplomatic relations with the USSR
May 1960	Castro orders US refineries to process Soviet crude; they refuse and he nationalizes them in June.
July 1960	US rescinds Cuban sugar quota
July 1960	Guevara says Cuban revolution was "socialist"
August 1960	Communist leader, Blas Roca, calls for fusion
January 1961	US breaks diplomatic relations with Cuba
February 1961	US imposes economic embargo against Cuba
April 1961	The Bay of Pigs

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1 May 1961	Castro says Cuba is a "socialist" state
July 1961	Announcement of PURS; ORI formed as intermediary step and Communists dominate it
1 December 1961	Castro says he is a Marxist-Leninist
March 1962	The Escalante affair
October 1962	The missile crisis
May 1963	Castro's first visit to the USSR
October 1963	Second Agrarian Reform Act announced
January 1964	Castro's second visit to the USSR
February 1964	The fishing boats-Guantanamo water incidents
April 1964	The U-2 overflight controversy

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ANNEX B

RELEVANT JUDGEMENTS FROM ESTIMATES AND MEMORANDA

1. SNIE 85-58, "THE SITUATION IN CUBA," 24 November 1958:

"Castro's lack of clarity about his objectives, beyond the elimination of Batista, has raised doubts about his long-range intentions among many non-26 of July opposition leaders who at the moment support him. Castro's infrequent pronouncements reflect no well-developed program, although they indicate definite concern for agrarian reform and the regulation of public utilities..." (Para. 5)

"In its inception, the 26 of July Movement was not anti-American. Until last summer, it sought to cultivate US good will. Since then, however, rebel propaganda has stressed the supposed US preference for dictatorship . . . Recently, however, Castro's propaganda has again evidenced a desire for US understanding." (Para. 8)

". . . the Cuban Communist Party (PSP), as such, has been excluded from both the 26 of July Movement and the Frente Civico Revolucionario (FCR), despite its recent strenuous efforts to get in. In Caracas, the Venezuelan Communist Party has actually hindered FCR activities, in order to compel the FCR to admit the Cuban Communist Party." (Para. 9)

"While we have insufficient evidence to establish the degree of Communist influence in the 26 of July Movement at the present time, the situation lends itself to Communist exploitation. Fidel Castro's control over his far-flung guerrillas is not so firm that he can prevent Communist infiltration even if he should so desire. A few alleged Communist sympathizers hold moderately important positions in the movement, especially among the troops led by Raul Castro." (Para. 10)

2. SNIE 100-3-59, "THREATS TO THE STABILITY OF THE US MILITARY FACILITIES POSITION IN THE CARIBBEAN AREA AND BRAZIL," 10 March 1959:

"In Cuba, the newly installed nationalist regime of Fidel Castro . . ." (Conclusion 2)

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"Moreover, some of his top advisors are antagonistic toward the US and these can count on support from extreme nationalists as well as from the Communist Party whose over-all prospects have measurably improved in the post-revolutionary confusion." (Para. 16)

3. SNIE 80-59, "THE SITUATION IN THE CARIBBEAN THROUGH 1959,"
30 June 1959:

"The Communists probably do not now control Castro, but they are in a position to exert influence in his regime and to carry on further organizational work. We believe that at least for the period of this estimate the Communists will continue to support Castro's program and will attempt to avoid giving Castro any cause for believing that they are seeking to usurp his position as leader. We, therefore, believe that Castro is unlikely to take the drastic steps necessary to check their increasing power." (Conclusion 2)

"Castro's brother Raul, who is strongly sympathetic to communism . . . Major Ernesto "Che" Guevara Serna, . . . , has consistently furthered Communist interests . . ." (Para. 17)

"Castro and certain of his followers have recently made anti-Communist statements which suggest that they have some concern about the local Communists as a potential threat to the 26th of July Movement's dominance. Thus far, however, Castro has taken virtually no action to curb the Communists, and we believe that he is unlikely to take drastic steps against them during the period of this estimate." (Para. 25)

4. Memorandum for the Director, "The Situation in the Caribbean,"
17 November 1959:

"The adverse trends projected in SNIE 80-59 have become considerably more pronounced since June. Castro's radical advisors -- and the Communists -- have continued to consolidate their positions at the expense of more moderate elements, but ultimate power apparently still rests with Fidel Castro himself." (Para. 2a)

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5. SNIE 80/1-59, "THE SITUATION IN THE CARIBBEAN THROUGH 1960,"
29 December 1959:

"... Raul Castro and Che Guevara -- both staunch pro-Communists if not actual Communists --" (Conclusion 1)

"Communist influence will almost certainly continue to increase in 1960 , largely as a result of the influence the Communists exert through Raul Castro and Che Guevara and Communist success in placing adherents in key position in the government. Nevertheless, we do not believe that during this period the Communists will be able to force Fidel Castro to adopt policies to which he is opposed." (Conclusion 2)

"In fact he probably will become increasingly dependent on them [Communists] and he may turn more to the Bloc for assistance." (Conclusion 3)

6. SNIE 85-60, "COMMUNIST INFLUENCE IN CUBA," 22 March 1960:

"In the domestic field, Castro is pursuing an increasingly radical program employing techniques used by the Communists themselves in other countries." (Para. 1)

"These developments obviously raise serious questions as to the degree to which Cuba may now be or may become subject to international Communist control . . . Prolongation of the present situation will result in even greater Communist influence in Cuba . . ." (Para. 5)

"His [Castro's] susceptibility to Communist influence and suggestion and his willing adoption of Communist patterns of action springs from the parallelism of his revolutionary views with the current Communist line in Latin America, from his conviction that communism offers no threat to his regime, and from his need for external support. He almost certainly has no intentions of sharing his power or abandoning his announced objective of developing a neutralist "third force" position for Cuba . . ." (Para. 6)

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"We believe that Fidel Castro and his government are not now demonstrably under the domination or control of the international Communist movement. Moreover, we believe that they will not soon come under such demonstrable domination or control. We reach this conclusion in part because we feel that under present circumstances International Communism does not desire to see a situation arise in which it could be clearly demonstrated that the regime in Cuba was under its domination. Yet, we believe that the Cuban regime is in practice following the line set for Latin American Communist parties at the time of the 21st Party Congress in Moscow in February 1959 and that it will continue to pursue policies advantageous to the Communists and to accept Communist assistance and advice in carrying them out. Cuba may give increasing appearances of becoming a Communist society." (Para. 8)

7. NIE 85-2-60, "THE SITUATION IN CUBA," 14 June 1960:

"Fidel Castro has replaced Batista's military dictatorship with a radical-nationalist one which is deeply and increasingly influenced by Communists. There is no longer any prospect of democratic government under his regime." (Conclusion 1)

"We are unable to answer the simplified question 'Is Castro himself a Communist?' Communists are deeply involved in the re-modeling of Cuba -- more so than in Guatemala in 1954 -- and the country has become a base for communism in Latin America. Clearly Castro regards the Communists as helpful and reliable allies in achieving his objectives; Communists and their supporters are in positions of importance throughout the revolutionary government. Given the mutuality of interest between the Castro regime and the Cuban Communists, it is difficult, and in most respects academic, to try to distinguish the policy and actions of the Castro regime from those which would be expected of a government under actual Communist control in the present circumstances in Cuba. This situation will almost certainly persist so long as Fidel Castro and his associates remain in power. Indeed, the outlook is for Castro's increased dependence on Communists and they will continue to be able to make many decisions and take many actions without consulting him. If this trend continues, the Communists will gain de facto control of the Castro regime, and are* near this point now." (Conclusion 4)

* The Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State would substitute "may be" for "are."

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8. SNIE 85-3-60, "PROSPECTS FOR THE CASTRO REGIME," 8 December 1960:

"These measures [taken by the Castro regime] are closely parallel to the traditional pattern of Communist takeover." (Para. 2)

"It is impossible to distinguish between the policies and actions of the Castro regime and the program presently advocated by the local Communists. The PSP is playing an increasingly important role in the Castro regime. It is providing guidance to Castro through his chief aids. PSP members fill key administrative, managerial, and military positions. The party's propaganda apparatus is of inestimable value to Castro. The party line laid down at the PSP congress last summer called for continued strong support of Castro, who was characterized as carrying out the essential first steps of a "revolution of national liberation." PSP spokesmen indicated that the regime would eventually evolve into a Communist state. Virtually all institutions of Cuban life are being remolded in the likeness of a typical Communist society. In short, for most practical purposes, the present Cuban Government can be regarded as Communist." (Para. 5)

9. Memorandum for the Director, "Why the Cuban Revolution of 1958 Led to Cuba's Alignment with the USSR," 21 February 1961:

"Prior to the overthrow of Batista, the 26th of July Movement was not Communist inspired or directed." (Para. 2)

"Fidel Castro, on his part, rejected Communist support when it was finally proffered. Indeed, on coming to power, he acted to break the control of organized labor which the Communists had seized . . ." (Para. 3)

[As disillusionment set in] "the Communists became the only dedicated and effective organizers, operators, and supporters upon whom Castro could rely, and Raul Castro and Che Guevara were at hand to influence him toward increasing reliance on them." (Para. 8)

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ANNEX B

10. NIE 80/90-61, "LATIN AMERICAN REACTION TO DEVELOPMENTS IN AND WITH RESPECT TO CUBA," 18 July 1961:

"He [Fidel] has pursued his objective [in LA] -- in close alliance with international communism . . ." (Para. 19)

11. SNIE 85-61, "THE SITUATION AND PROSPECTS IN CUBA," 28 November 1961:

"The regime is now in the process of completely reorganizing the form of government in Cuba, and is developing a new totalitarian political party to operate and control it. The Communist model is apparent in both instances." (Para. 13)

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ANNEX B

12. NIE 85-62, "THE SITUATION AND PROSPECTS IN CUBA," 21 March 1962:

"The pattern of events in Cuba clearly reveals the historical step by step Communist procedure for attaining complete control of a country. During the past year Cuba has, in effect, gone behind an iron curtain. The regime has thoroughly reorganized its political, economic, police, and military systems in the classic Communist ideological fashion. It has also sought to identify itself with the Soviet Bloc in terms that would obligate the USSR to protect it. The Bloc, however, has avoided any explicit military commitment to defend Cuba." (Conclusion 1)

"Since his accession to power in 1959, Castro has collaborated increasingly with the Communists. However, the limited evidence regarding the precise nature of his relations with the Communists is confused, contradictory, and open to various interpretations. On 1 December 1961, Castro said in effect that he was greatly influenced by Marx and Lenin while a university student, but that he was then prejudiced against the Communists -- that he held essentially his present ideas in 1954, but that his understanding of them was then doctrinally imprecise -- that he became a proper Marxist-Leninist some time after his accession to power in 1959. He intimated that he had kept the matter a secret because its announcement would have cost him needed support. This probably is an essentially true account of his present appreciation of himself and his personal political development. While for all intents and purposes we can now consider Castro as being fully wedded to the Communist cause, his passionate avowals do not necessarily mean that he is considered by the Soviet and hardcore Cuban Communists as being a completely indoctrinated, disciplined, and reliable Communist." (Para. 19)

"In sum, the story of Castro's relations with the Communists leaves much unclear. It seems established that he did not make his revolution as a disciplined Communist. From expediency, and probably from conviction as well, he has identified himself with the Communists and evidently now wishes to be regarded as fully committed to their cause. It seems likely, however, that both the Soviet and Cuban Communists, partly because he is a recent and untutored convert and partly because of his impetuous personal style, retain doubts about his complete reliability. In this situation, some degree of friction is probable despite the identity

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of interests and mutual dependence that now bind Castro and the Communists. Whether it ever becomes significant enough to disrupt the present pattern of close collaboration will depend on Castro's temperament and his understanding of his own interests as well as upon the degree of flexibility which the Communists exercise in dealing with him. On balance we think that the development of an open conflict between Castro and the Communists is highly unlikely." (Para. 30)

13. NIE 85-2-62, "THE SITUATION AND PROSPECTS IN CUBA," 1 August 1962:

Not pertinent to issue

14. SNIE 85-3-62, "THE MILITARY BUILDUP IN CUBA," 19 September 1962:

Not on subject

15. SNIE 85-4-62, "CASTRO'S SUBVERSIVE CAPABILITIES IN LATIN AMERICA," 9 November 1962:

Not on subject

16. Memorandum for the Director, "Possible Soviet Courses of Action in and with Respect to Cuba," 13 March 1963:

"The Soviets are having trouble controlling Cuba's Maximum leader: Soviet percheron and Cuban mustang do not work well in harness." (Para. 21)

17. Memorandum for the Director, "Cuba A Year Hence," 22 April 1963:

"Castro's relations with the Moscow-oriented Communists are still uncertain. Castro is probably still suspicious of their relations with Moscow, ..." (Para. 13)

"Castro wants all the benefits of Soviet economic and military commitments but insists on an unique position in the Bloc outside Communist discipline and control." (Para. 24)

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ANNEX B

18. Memorandum for the Director, "Implications of Castro's Visit,"
29 May 1963:

"Khrushchev has also removed any doubt that Castro is leader of Communism in Cuba and its final arbiter." (Para. 5)

19. NIE 85-63, "SITUATION AND PROSPECTS IN CUBA," 14 June 1963:

Nothing new or relevant on subject.

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